

# Understanding Calorie Density

## The Key to Weight Loss Without Dieting

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Wouldn't it be nice if it were true that you could eat all you want and still lose weight and maintain it for life? Do you think it's possible -- or is it just a bunch of hype to sell a diet book or some kind of supplement? On the other hand, what if you want to GAIN weight? A few of us are active enough to have to work at maintaining weight. The good news is you can do either, and the key in both cases is understanding calorie density.

Calorie density simply refers to how many calories are in a pound of any particular food. Some foods have a very low calorie density. Can you guess which ones? Vegetables! On average, vegetables have only 100 calories per pound. At the opposite end of the spectrum are oil and fat, which have 4000 calories per pound! It makes sense that the more vegetables



you eat, the less calories you are consuming. The more oil and fat you eat, the more calories you consume. In fact, just one tablespoon of oil has 120 calories, which is more than a whole pound of most vegetables.

For comparison purposes, take a look at the average number of calories per pound in various types of foods:

- Vegetables.....100
- Fruits.....300
- Unrefined carbohydrates  
(e.g. rice, potatoes).....500
- Legumes  
(beans, peas and lentils).....600
- Fatty protein  
(e.g. meat and cheese).....1000

- Refined carbohydrates  
(e.g. breads, crackers).....1400
- Junk food  
(e.g. cookies, chips, candy)....2300
- Nuts and seeds.....2800
- Oil and fat.....4000

Would it be possible to overeat on broccoli? No. How about nuts? A cup of cashews is 800 calories. I don't know about you, but I could easily consume a cup of nuts in no time!

As people begin making a sincere effort to choose healthier foods, they often decide to switch from snacking on candy and chips to snacking on nuts. Even though nuts may be healthier, they actually have a HIGHER calorie density than junk food, so our aspiring healthy eater may actually start to gain weight instead of losing--and then wonder why this doesn't work for them.

When we refine foods, we generally remove water, fiber, and nutrients.

This increases the calorie density, even in cases where the food is still basically a healthy food. Compare grapes, at about 280 calories per pound and raisins at 500 calories per pound. The only difference is the amount of water. So which are we more likely to overeat, grapes or raisins? Again, many people begin snacking on dried fruit, not realizing that if they ate fresh fruit instead, they would be consuming far less calories.

Characteristics of low calorie-density foods are:

- High in water content
- High in fiber

This is why vegetables and fruits are the lowest in calorie density. They have a lot of water in them, and lots of fiber and bulkiness.

Foods that are the most filling are also:

- High in water content
- High in fiber
- High in bulk

This explains why eating a plate full of vegetables is filling, but making those vegetables into a soup and adding

more liquid makes it even more filling.

People tend to eat about the same amount of *weight* of food each day. Since the low calorie-density foods have a lot of water in them, this makes them heavier. So if we eat the same weight of food each day, but switch to lower calorie-density foods, we can eat as much as we want without it being too many calories. On the other hand, adding even relatively small amounts of the higher calorie-density foods can increase our caloric intake dramatically.

For those wanting to gain weight, adding more nuts and seeds, as well as generous amounts of beans and unrefined carbohydrates will add the calories you need. Even if you want to gain weight, it is important to avoid the junk food and fatty animal foods, as well as pure oil and fat because they are deficient in nutrients and fiber and don't promote health.

Understanding calorie density takes the mystery out of weight management. When we choose to eat unrefined plant foods, we are loading up on nutrients. Then, we can look at the calorie density scale to decide which foods to increase or decrease depending upon whether we want to lose, maintain, or gain weight.

(This information was taken from [Jeff Novick's](#) DVD: *Calorie Density. How to Eat More, Weigh Less and Live Longer.*)